

PLSR: The Public Library System Redesign project

*By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
Winnefox Library System*

Many of you have heard about the ongoing Public Library System Redesign project. Over 80 librarians from around the state have been working for the past 18 months, asking what services 21st Century libraries need and how library systems can best provide those services.

Some interesting ideas are coming out of this process. Some services may be provided regionally rather than by local systems. In other cases it may be better to provide services locally.

The workgroups are now developing their service models and hope to be able to present these at this fall's Wisconsin Library Association Conference in Wisconsin Dells. After comments from the wider library community these will be presented to the Superintendent for Public Instruction some time next spring or summer.

You can find a lot of information on the PLSR site <http://www.plsr.info/>. Meeting minutes, recordings, and other documents are available, as is information on upcoming meetings. Most meetings are conducted online and you can listen in if you choose.



The Value of Time Away from the Desk

By Mark Arend
Winnefox Library System

From time to time I hear from library directors that they have difficulty finding time for administrative and other tasks because the library board is reluctant to schedule hours for the director to work away from the public service desk or when the library is closed. As one director put it: “My Board knows that I am way behind with updating policies, bylaws, etc but they are more concerned about what people can see happening at the library and the services they receive.”

This is shortsighted because the library’s services and activities are directly related to the ability of staff, especially the director, to spend time planning those services and activities, evaluating them, and planning changes and improvements.

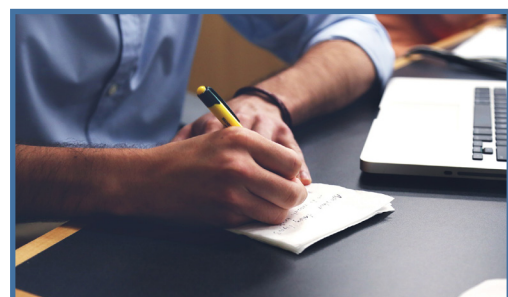
Here are some “off-desk” activities that should be part of the director’s duties and included in the library’s budget.

- **Community Engagement.** The modern library is not an ivory tower, remote and protected from the world. It is, or should be, an active and vital part of your community and the director needs to be involved in the community. Consider including membership fees to a service club, Chamber of Commerce, or other community organization. The board should support the director’s being an active participant in the group, not just an occasional meeting attendee. The board should also support the director’s attending meetings of other organizations to speak about and promote the library’s activities.
- **Municipal Government.** The library is as much a part of local government as is the Police or Public Works departments and it is important to build relationships with other municipal employees and with the municipal board. If the village or city department heads meet on a regular basis the library

director should be included. The director should also attend meetings of the City Council or Village Board to report on what the library is doing and to answer any questions they have.

- **Continuing Education.** The director and staff both need opportunities for continuing education. Attending workshops and conferences is how they network with other directors and library workers, hear great ideas, learn new skills, and recharge their batteries. And, of course, directors are required to complete 100 hours of continuing education every five years.
- **Planning.** If things never changed there would be no need to plan; the library could offer the same programs and services as it did in 1965. But that’s not the case; peoples’ expectations and needs are always changing and the library needs to change with it. The director and staff need time to understand what the community needs and plan the best way for the library to fulfil those needs.
- **Library administration.** Budgeting, statistical reports, policy revision, book ordering, and paperwork filing are not exciting tasks. But they are essential for the smooth operation of the library. And they are often best done during an uninterrupted stretch of time.

All these “behind the scenes” tasks that neither the public nor the board sees are as important to the library’s success as the time spent working directly with the public. While some of these can be done while working at a service desk, they will be done much more effectively and efficiently without interruption.



Ask Them What They Want Part 2: Questions, Questions

*By Mark Arend, Assistant Director
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In the last issue I discussed some of the whys and hows of surveying your community. In this article I'll talk about how to develop your questions.

Begin by digging into data you already have. Go over the past few years' worth of library statistics to review past usage and see if you can spot trends. Look at usage of all your services: checkout of physical items, use of digital resources, library visits, programming, etc. Look at your community demographics and local economy and where they are expected to change in the next few years. Have staff and trustees brainstorm to remember comments they've heard about what people like and don't like about the library.

Here are some Do's and Don'ts for questions:

Do

- Think of how the survey flows. Try to make groups of questions proceed logically from one to the next.
- Make it short enough that it can be completed in 5 – 10 minutes.
- Reassure people that all responses will be anonymous, that demographic questions will only be used for survey purposes, and that any drawing entries will be kept strictly separate from survey responses.
- Vary the types of questions. Don't have all the Yes/No questions followed by all the multiple-choice. Mix them up.
- Give people plenty of opportunities to comment.
- Ask open-ended questions. Example: I wish the library would... or The thing I like most about the library is... or What bothers me most about the library is...
- Put "uncomfortable" questions, such as age or income ranges, at the end of the survey.

Don't

- Use suggestive or leading questions, or questions that assume something that has not been established. A question like How often do you use the library's eBooks? assumes that the person does use eBooks.
- Use double-barreled questions: questions that ask more than one thing. How often and how much time do you spend on each visit to the library? should be divided into two questions, one about frequency of visits and on length.
- Use UUAOOT (unexplained or unknown acronyms or other terminology). Terms that seem obvious to you will be confusing to others.
- If asking someone to rate according to a scale, don't make the scale unbalanced. Example: How was your library experience? Fantastic. Great. Good. OK.
- If asking people to select one or more options from a list be sure you include all possible response options in your list. You can also end the list with Other and give space to write an answer.
- Ask about a change you aren't prepared to make. If you have no intention of looking at increased library hours don't ask if people would like the library open more hours each week. Instead ask about changing hours while keeping the total hours the same.



FAQ

What's the rule on public comments at library board meetings? Do we have to allow members of the public to speak?

No, there is no requirement that public bodies allow a public comments time at meetings. It is, however, a common practice and your municipality may have policies on public comments. If you do allow public comments you may limit the time each person is allowed or the total time given for comments to ensure the meeting is conducted in an orderly manner.

Also note that if an issue is brought up the board may not discuss it at any length or make a decision unless it is already on the agenda. At the most you should receive the comments, decide whether to place the issue on your next meeting's agenda, and ask the director to prepare a report or collect information.

Have questions?
Contact us and we'll try to help.

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Save the Dates – 2017

Wisconsin Trustee Training Week

August 21-25

12 Noon – 1:00 PM each day

Webinars you can attend from your home, office, or library

<http://www.wistrusteetraining.com/register.html>

Trustee 201: The Library Board as

Employer September 14, 6:00 PM – 8:00

PM Ripon Public Library

<https://extranet.winnefox.org/ce/trustee201-2017>

Trustee 301: Open Meetings & Public

Records Laws September 20, 6:00 pm to

8:00 pm Caestecker Public Library, Green Lake

<https://extranet.winnefox.org/ce/trustee301-2017>

Wisconsin Library Association (WLA)

2017 Conference October 17-20 Kalahari

Resort & Convention Center, Wisconsin

Dells

[http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/events-](http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/events-conferences/annual-conference/wla-conference-home)

[conferences/annual-conference/wla-conference-](http://wla.wisconsinlibraries.org/events-conferences/annual-conference/wla-conference-home)

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If you have questions, comments or suggestions

for future articles, send them to:

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